PROMENADE

A MAGAZINE OF AMERICAN FOLKLORE

VOL VIII

ISSUE I

THE AMERICAN SQUARE DANCE GROUP

NEW YORK

"The purpose of the American Square Dance Group is to make available those rich stores of native dance, music, and general Americana which comprise American folk culture; to conduct activities without regard to race, creed, color or social position; to cooperate with those who hold similar views."
Constitution of the A.S.D.G.

STAFF
Margot Mayo, Editor
Freddie Wiedorn, Bob Trotta
Irving Friedman, Sue Elson, Edith Kramer
Copyright Jan. 1950 by the A.S.D.G.
Published ten times yearly
Subscription $1.50 a year
Single mailed copy 25¢
550 Riverside Drive, New York 27, N.Y.

"LEADBELLY"

The king of the twelve string guitar has left us. By the time this reaches you his death, on December 6th, will undoubtedly, in this fast-moving, forgetful world, be old news. But to those of us who called him friend, who have listened to his singing, in person and on recordings, forgetting will not be easy.

How can we ever hear "Irene," or "The Midnight Special," or "The Hammer Song," or any other of hundreds of songs, without remembering Huddie Ledbetter?

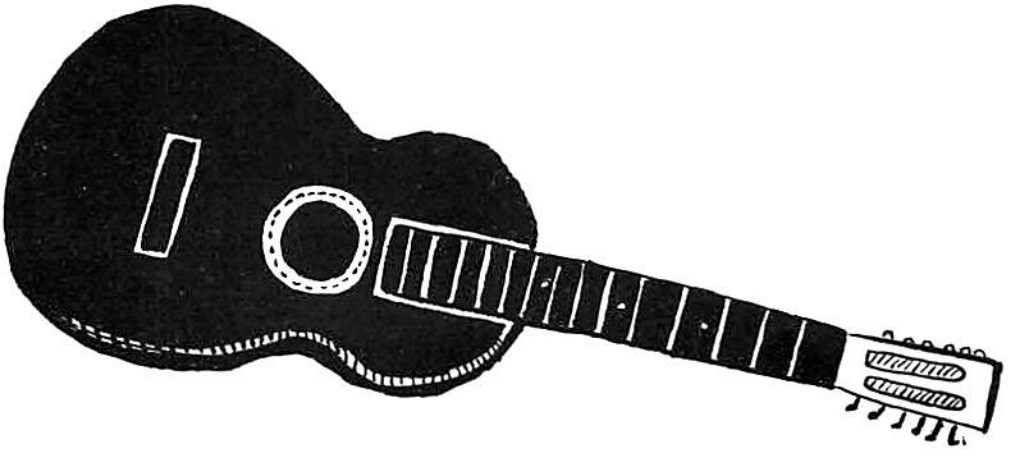
Huddie's magnificent guitar-picking, typical of early Jazz, his jigging, his stories, and, of course, his huge repertory of all kinds of songs, made him a treasury of folklore.

To those of us who knew him, Huddie was not merely a colorful character made romantic by weird stories of murder, of prisons, of cotton fields under the hot Texas sun. Huddie was part of our heritage, a person the past has handed to us.

"Leadbelly" was a simple person, a product of a special environment, a part of a special segment of America, of our national background which some of us prefer to ignore. But Huddie didn't forget that background, and he never forgot his people. Radio, concerts and stage appearances, even Hollywood, could not change "Leadbelly" or separate him from the simple, human beings who were his people.

Speaking for myself, I want to say, "Huddie, I'm sorry. I'm sorry you've gone away. I'm sorry I did not get to see you as often as I would have liked. But I'm grateful to you, grateful for the stories you told me, for the songs and the play-party games you taught me, for the many hours of pleasure you brought to me, to my pupils, and to all the members of the American Square Dance Group. I'm grateful for the many hours of music and laughter and fun we all had together. Thanks, Huddie, for letting me be your friend, and thanks for being my friend."

Margot



A FOLKLORE PROGRAM

We have often stated that folklore has a much wider range of utility than the purely recreational one we commonly associate with it. In an effort to make this point of view clearer, we are including in this issue a folklore program presented by teen-age youngsters who were in my folklore workshop at camp last summer. These boys and girls did the research and prepared the script for the program. The program lasted about an hour. We have cut some of the stage directions and have left only a skeleton outline which we hope may be of use to our subscribers. The narration was divided between several boys and girls, which allowed a larger number of youngsters to participate in the program. Because of the great length of the program, we have divided it into two parts. We will print the second half in the next issue, and along with it a complete bibliography, which will enable Promenade subscribers to locate quickly any of the dances which they might wish to include in such a program. Let us know how you feel about the introduction of such material into our magazine, and if it has been of any use to you.

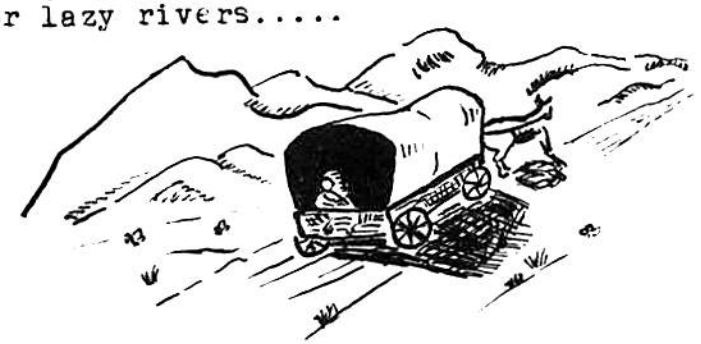
M. M.

CURTAIN

Narrator: The history of our country is a tapestry, a fabric of many strands, many colors,..threads reaching back through many generations, to many lands and many peoples. The design is complex, sometimes confused, for the threads are closely interwoven. In places the fabric, worn thin, has been mended and strengthened by new threads. But the pattern, strong and beautiful, harsh or ugly, is a part of us, and we are a part of the pattern.

Narrator: Pioneers, explorers, nomads and settlers...that's us..that is America....rough as the bark of an ironwood tree, turbulent as Niagara Falls, tough as a fighting-mad catamount and smooth as a city slicker...that's us!

Narrator: And, like us, our folklore is varied, beautiful, vulgar, laughable and loveable. Songs, dances, stories, beliefs, have travelled with us, across angry seas, through dark forests, over mountains and white-hot prairies, down furious or lazy rivers.....



Narrator: The folklore of the mother-countries is ours, now, and the past and the present, the so-called foreign and the so-called native, are woven like the threads on the loom.....

Narrator: Now, take our language....our speech is American, not English; our slang, our folk-sayings, our serious words still show the influence of the lands across the seas. The farmer, pausing to unfold his red bandana, would be surprised to know that the word bandana is a Hindu word.....

Narrator: The southern chef, with his goobers and gumbo and yams, probably doesn't know that he is using words of African derivation.

Narrator: The country-fiddler playing "Pop Goes the Weasel" probably doesn't know that the title of his tune means, literally, "to pawn a tool used in making hats."

Narrator: And it's a pretty sure bet that the square dance caller doesn't realize that he is speaking French when he calls "Allemande left, balance, chassez, or do-si-do." Nor do the dancers know that many of the dances they enjoy on a Saturday night are really very ancient, stemming in some cases, from ritual dances that date back to the days of the Druids.

Narrator: Perhaps they don't know about these things, but we all do know there's been dancing and singing in this country as long as man has been here. The Indians danced and sang; the Pilgrims and Puritans had their psalms and hymns, and the early colonists sang; they danced, too, the dances they had enjoyed in the old country, dances like the English country dance that will be performed now.

(lights on dancers for performance of any English dance)

Narrator: They danced other dances too, that have become as American as frankfurters and sauerkraut.

Narrator: And the caller is an American addition..he was invented, probably, as a kind of traffic cop, for American dances are democratic, social dances in which large numbers of dancers can participate. Someone is needed to direct, and hold together, the different sets of dancers. And, in the old days, when in some regions the minister was installed by means of an Ordination Ball, and many people wanted to dance dances like "New Portland Fancy," a caller was naturally needed to weld together the different versions of of the dance that the participants might have learned.

(lights on dancers for "New Portland Fancy.)

Narrator: That dance was a fancy, because, although four couples dance in each set, the formation is different from the usual square set. Another formation typical of New England is the longways, or contra dance. This type of dance was as popular during the Revolutionary War as it is today. Even the dignified George Washington loved to dance the Virginia Reel," or, perhaps, "Twin Sisters."

(lights on dancers in longways sets.)

Narrator: Not long after the Revolution a new type of dance was imported from England. The quadrille became one of the most important of the 19th century dances. It hasn't changed much through the years, although in some cases it has been modified.

Narrator: Or forgotten altogether, in some regions. But today this dance is being rediscovered, for more and more folks are becoming aware that these difficult, formal dances can be great fun to perform.

(lights on dancers for a quadrille.)

Narrator: Our songs, dances, and stories are travellers! They could not "just stay put" in New England or along the coastline, they went with the people on foot, or horseback, or in the covered wagons. They went with Daniel Boone through the Cumberland Gap; they stayed with the Irish, Scottish and English who settled in the Smoky Mountains. They followed the Appalachian trail from Maine to Tennessee, and the fiddle and banjo tunes, the songs and stories, provided entertainment for the lonely, isolated settlers.

(lights on story-teller, who spins a few "tall tales.")

Narrator: The fiddlin' contests, square dances, church services, camp meetings, box suppers, quiltin' parties and the barn raisings, these were the entertainments of the people.....

Narrator: Abe Lincoln went to square dances and to play parties. He knew the sound of fiddle and banjo, and he knew the singing of the people he loved so well. He may have played a game called "Oh, Susanna," to the tune of a popular song of his day.

(dancers take partners and move onto stage from all directions, perform "Oh, Susanna.")

(to be continued in the next issue)

TWIN SISTERS

This longways, which has been done in New England for over a century, is typical, not only of the ball room dance of the period, but of the country dance as well.

Music: "Twin Sisters."
Formation: Longways set; every other couple is active.

Calls:

1. Ladies on the inside, gents on the outside, all chassez
   Balance
   Chassez back

2. Gents on the inside, ladies on the outside, all chassez
   Balance
   Chassez back

3. Actives down the center
   And back again

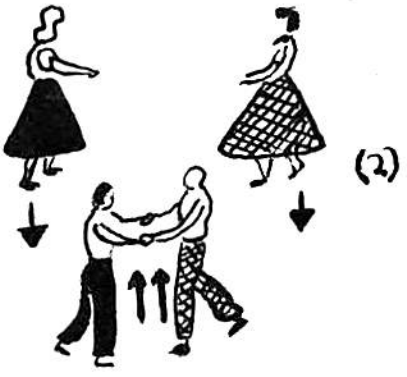
4. Cast off and right and left

Description:

1. The active ladies face down the set, the inactives face up. They join hands and slide to the gents' place. At the same time, the gents face the same way, and slide to the ladies' place, going behind their partners.
   All balance in place, forward and back.*
   Return to place in the same manner.

2. The figure is repeated with the gents joining hands and the ladies sliding over, moving behind them.
   (Throughout these figures, actives face down and the inactives face up the set.)

3. The active couples promenade down the center of the set, turn individually, and return up the set.
   The actives step into line just below the inactive couples with whom they've been dancing.
   These pairs of dancers move directly across the set, with the ladies passing inside the pair of gents.
   On reaching the opposite side, the ladies turn toward each other, while the gents turn. The active gent moves forward in this turn, while the inactive gent backs up. Return in same way.

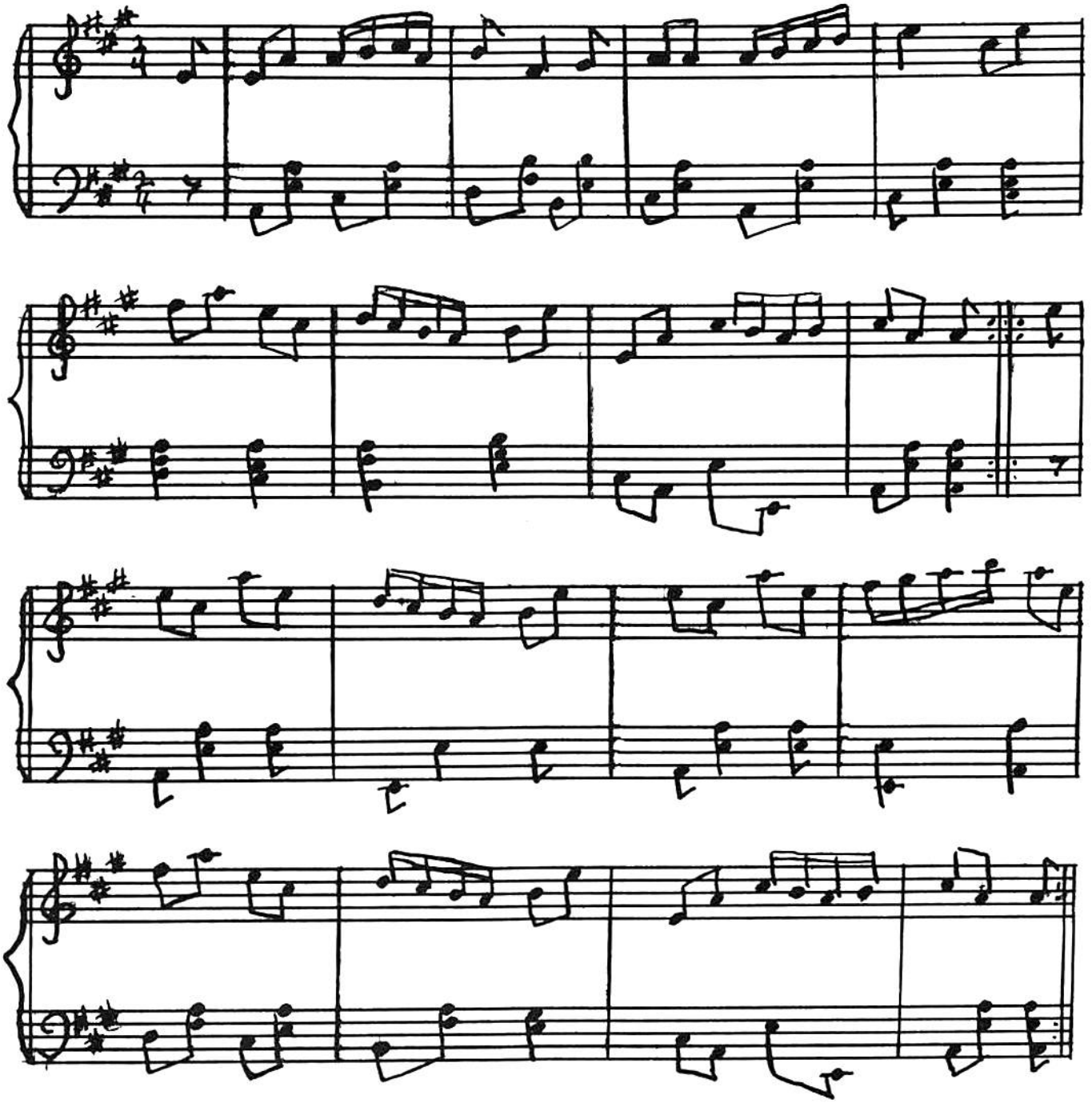


*Those with hands joined balance away from each other, the others to each other.

TWIN SISTERS

There are several versions of dance tunes with the title "Twin Sisters," but this is the one we like best, because it is a spirited tune with accents that just naturally fit the dance "Twin Sisters." We have, as is our practice, put only the barest harmonic accompaniment to the tune, for we feel that most pianists who play for folk dances like to improvise their own accompaniments.

In the next issue we will print another version of "Twin Sisters," one which is an equally good tune, and is good for almost any square or longways dance that does not require its own special tune.



Notes of Interest

The Cooper Union Forum is presenting a series of eleven free concerts on Friday evenings. On successive Friday evenings, starting on February 17, folk songs of Lithuania, sung by Biryta Ramoska, of Israel, by Ruth Rubin, of South America, by Olga Coelha, of Arabia by Wadeeha Atiyeh, and Germany by Alice Howland, will be presented. On March 24, Oscar Brand will present "Children's Folk Songs for Adults."

The series will come to an end on March 31, when Alan Lomax will perform. He will trace the history of our American folk songs and will sing some of the songs he learned when he was in the South, recording for the Library of Congress.

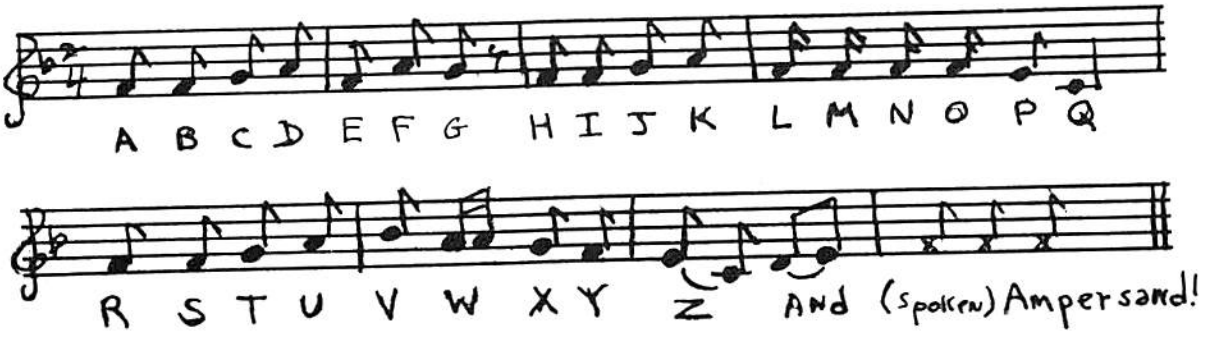
Paul Kermiet has sent us word of his coming folk dance camp, to be held at Lookout Mountain, Golden, Colorado. This, the third annual Rocky Mountain Folk Dance Camp, will hold two separate sessions, one from July 16-29, and the second from July 30 to August 12.

The plans are for three dance sessions daily, featuring Western and Texas square and couple dances and other round dances; English and Danish folk dances; mixers and other nationality dances. There will be a lot of singing, chances for discussions, and plenty of opportunities to practice calling.

Rod LaFarge has published a collection of singing calls, named Garden State Square Dances. The book is one dollar, and may be obtained by writing Rod LaFarge, at 115 Cliff Street, Haledon, Paterson 2, New Jersey.

The National Folk Festival will be held at the Kiel Auditorium, in St. Louis, from April 12 to April 15. Callers, dancers, musicians and folk singers from all over the country, will participate.

THE ALPHABET



"The Alphabet" is a nonsense song we learned, last summer, from Bill Tucker. We met Bill and his wife when we were passing through New Hampshire. We learned a great deal from them and wished we'd had more time to spend with them. We wrote about the Tuckers in Promenade, issue 9 of volume VII.

Bill thought "The Alphabet" was an extremely funny song, and roared over that last measure. He explained it to us, over and over again, to be sure we got the joke! Personally, we liked the ditty because it is an example of another setting of that much-used, or abused tune "Yankee Doodle." Has anyone ever tried to trace the number of texts which have been set to this tune? Might be fun, but it might also become a life's work!